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Free For All

This Campaign Is Not 'Routine'

In their front-page story "CIA Document Based on Lobbying Techniques" [March 1], Bob Woodward and Lou Cannon tell us in the first paragraph that a "New York firm" has prepared "a routine lobbying strategy" for the government of Nicaragua.

In the second paragraph we're told it was written by two former Catholic priests. The third paragraph begins with a variation of the first-paragraph theme of the old-hat nature of the techniques used by this firm: "Employing language and tactics similar to those of many other legislative lobbying campaigns. . . ."

If we have not as yet gotten the message, in paragraph 11, we are told of "standard lobbying techniques."

Are Woodward and Cannon trying to tell us something? Yes, they are: Everybody does it, so what is all this administration fuss about a disinformation campaign? Most of us are not as sophisticated—one might say even jaded—as these two famous reporters. When we read of a well-financed propaganda campaign by a communist government to manipulate American opinion and subvert the democratic process by spreading propaganda through what the registered agents of the Sandinista government call "religious group activities" and "the progressive press," we don't care about the fact that the techniques used are similar to those used in ordinary public relation efforts.

Woodward and Cannon's concern with the form of dissemination rather than the content and goals of propaganda may be defensible, but what part it has in a news story is not

clear. Why are we not told until paragraph 10 that this "New York firm" (or "consultants") is a well-paid (\$25,000 a month and a "long-term contract") registered agent of the only communist government on the mainland of the western hemisphere? Why does the headline mention the CIA but not the Sandinistas? What about the phrase "Nicaragua's congressional district campaign?" Is it "routine" for a communist government to have such a campaign?

And then there's the proposed campaign to work closely with American "church groups" for the purpose of getting across the message of the Nicaraguan government, i.e., engaging in a communist disinformation plan. This is potentially one of the most explosive news stories in recent political history. But Woodward and Cannon didn't ask the paid Nicaraguán agents why they believe any reputable church group would help spread such propaganda. Do the consultants know something about Sandinista influence in the United States that we don't? Has the Sandinista government already managed to manipulate the activities of certain church groups? If not, what are their plans for doing so?

This story contains the hidden premises and disguised ideological agendas that are even now destroying public faith in an important American institution. What were Post editors doing when this one went by?

—William F. Gavin

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